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Main Idea: Paul is a man in prison for a crime he did not commit. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that our true life is not in our circumstances or material goods; rather, the authentic life is who we are in Christ. The life in Christ is one where we do have an effectual calling, life that matters and with a purpose, no matter what we have been through, what we are going through, or what is ahead of us. So, we can live our lives, no matter what, worthy, in a determined way to know more about our Lord. We must grow more in our Lord and be as He has called us to be--being humble in our personality and dealings with others so we are not easily angered. Be gentle how we treat others so we are not anxious, especially to those who can do nothing for us like people who are infirmed, elderly, and children, even those we do not like. By Christ working in us, we can have patience on God's timing with our desires and needs and with others. This will transform our personality and temperament, so our Christianity is authentic; this transformation will help us so that we are not irritable or selfish. We can be caring and not rude, compassionate and not jealous, constructive and not prideful. By this, we show our love from our kindness and a lack of conceit so we can look for the best in our situation and in others, too. This will help us be true and real in Christ, to have a sense of serenity, and be able to endure through it all. How do we do this? By keeping our step in Christ working in us and by the Holy Spirit's enabling. By knowing we, as Christians, are in One and are one in unity, bounded by love, and we all have His hope.

Contexts and Background:

In chapters one through three, Paul uses a storytelling device called, 'epideictic'. This is much like a persuasive or encouragement speech in which God's precepts and calls are laid out. Think of a graduation speech. Then, Paul switches his tone. In the last half of his epistle, he writes an 'exhortation'. This is to urge us to do as we are clearly being called to do. This is challenge for us today just as it was in the Greek and Romans cultures; we are exhorted to be meek, humble, and kind in a world where kindness is seen as weakness and humility is unworthy in those who would be powerful, strong, and influential.

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Urge/I beseech you.* Paul's main concern was whether his teaching would be applied, studied, or ignored. The apprehension was that Christians would turn out like the Pharisees and Philosophers; they would have the knowledge while ignoring the application. Paul was concerned that some would have just the emotion without knowledge (and application). The irony is that many of us are! Following Christ requires a response; this response is a key aspect of maturing in faith and growth in Christ. The purpose and study of His Word or of doctrine is not just knowledge, (which is very important); it is equally important and necessary that we apply the knowledge. This application is our supreme goal (Rom. 12:1-2).
- *Live a life worthy/walk worthy.* This means 'go' and 'live' in the manner of what we know and believe--and, do it consistently. This refers to our conduct and character. We do this when we are pursuing God and His righteousness and believing His precepts. We do this when we live in such way so He is more, and we are less in our will. This is our "walk with God", and it means living out the daily Christian life as He has called, behaving in response to our gratitude to His Work in and for us. In context, it is also being empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is never the walk in our own will and strength; such a thing is pride and disobedience to our loving Lord (Lev. 26:3; Ezek. 36:27; Mark 10:29-31; John 3:30; Gal. 2:20-21; 5:16; Eph. 4:1, 17; 5:1-2, 8, 15; Phil. 3:10-14; Col. 1:10).

- *Calling/vocation.* This refers to our 'heavenly calling', and it has several meanings. First, this is a call to persevere in the faith and grow in Christ. Second, this is call to focus on what is important--Christ and our inheritance because of Him in the reward of the life to come. Our reward is eternal life with the Father in Heaven, not in our earthly pursuits. Third, this is our invitation, our call to salvation, which comes from heaven and leads us back to heaven. Our life on earth is a mere shadow of what is most important: Christ, His Kingdom, and Heaven to come (Heb. 3:1; 9:15; 11:16; 2 Pet. 1:10).
- *Humble/lowliness.* This refers to our correct understanding of who we are in Christ and how, in submission, we go before God. This requires having a humble opinion of ourselves. This does not mean we are to hate ourselves. Rather, it means to have a right respect and relationship with God (Prov. 3:5). Our attitudes toward God will greatly affect our attitudes in how we communicate and how we act. These will be revealed by the motives of our hearts. We learn humility by being in His Word and going before God with our dependence on Him, seeking His will, and being in prayer. This humility is submitting to the sovereignty of God (Proverbs 1:24-33; 6:16; 8:13, Isaiah 57:15; 66:2; Micah 6:8). We remove our pride by "clinging" to the Cross, confessing our sins, and seeking forgiveness from God and others whom we have offended. Our discipline in the faith will help strengthen our walk as we continue to grow in Him. Our motivation is the realization that we are saved by grace, and kept by His love (1 Kings 8:58; Psalm 25; Matt. 11:29; Mark 1:7; Luke 9:23; 18:9-14; 22:27; Romans 12:3; Eph. 4:1-3; Col. 1:18; Phil. 2:8; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:3-5).
- *Gentle/Meekness.* This is how the Holy Spirit works in us and through us, by grace being interwoven into our soul, so that we are transformed; humility brings character. Gentleness and meekness indicate that our strength is under His control so that we encourage and uplift others with manipulation or deceit (Psalm 37:11; Matt. 5: 3-5; 11:29; 2 Cor. 3:12; 10:1; Gal. 5:23; 6:1; Col. 3:12-14; 2 Tim. 2:25).
- *Patient/long-suffering.* This refers to the willingness to allow for the failings of others while showing tolerance and fortitude to them. It is also waiting without usurping our will or control because we have peace and direction from God. It is allowing God the room and time to work through us and others around us (Hos. 2:19-23; Psalm 33:20; Matthew 27:14; Rom. 2:4; 5:3; 12:12; Gal. 5:1; Eph. 4:2; Col. 1:11; 1 Tim. 1:16; James 1:3-4,12; 5:10-11).
- *Bearing with one another/forbearing.* This refers to "putting up" with those who rub you the wrong way. This means liking the unlikable and loving the unlovable with a good attitude and response. When we are in Christ, we as Christians are to be deep friends that bond as a family (Col. 3:12-14).
- *In love.* This is a call to take the initiative, as Christ did with us, and operate in the Fruit of the Spirit and brotherly love. (Mark 12:28-31; 1 John 4:7-21).
- *Every effort/endeavoring.* This refers to making haste with effort, willingness, enthusiasm, and diligence as building faith and a church requires these (2 Tim. 2:15).
- *Unity.* This refers to 'oneness'. This is not about organization or denomination. This is about loyalty to Christ in Christ. This is about correct doctrine--one faith, one baptism--of His precepts and our fellowship. This is about our spiritual unity in Him. One of the aspects of real, true love is that it is an adhesive to relationships and the effective building upon one another and a church. This is our oneness in Christ as a communal community of believers who come together for something and Someone (Christ) who is bigger than us or our collective unity (Rom. 5:5; Eph. 4:3; Phil. 1:27; 2:2; 1 Thess. 4:9).

- *Of the Spirit.* The Holy Spirit is the source and flow of our Christian love and togetherness. This is an action, attitude, and application, not simply a feeling or emotion. Through the Holy Spirit, we can have an impact on our relationships, church, neighborhood, and the world beyond our imagination, past our fears and hurts--all and only because of Christ. As Christians, we have no excuse not to love or have joy no matter what our situation is (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22)!
- *Bond of peace.* This is a sharing of the God-given tranquility, which comes from the surrendering and yielding of ourselves to Christ as Lord. When Christ is in control, we have peace because He is the source of ultimate peace! Peace in our hearts, homes, and churches. This is achieved when we allow serenity from our harmonious relationship with Christ to be our attitude, control, and composure. Peace promotes unity and love and forgiveness. Peace is a Fruit of the Spirit that comes from the tree of love that is fruited with wisdom, pruned with virtue, watered with forgiveness, and produces the sweet fruits of "*compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience*" (Isa. 26:3; Matt. 5:9; Luke 19:42; John 14:27; 16:33; Rom. 5:1; 12:18; Gal. 5:19-23; Col. 3:15; Phil. 4:7).
- *One body.* This is a colloquialism for the Church; it is "corporate" union with Christ. It is not a building; rather, it is a "spiritual house of people" in relationship of unity, deriving life in and from Him. Being of His membership means our identity is in Him, and we are affected personally and publicly, synergizing as a community that is formed, indwelt, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are all precious, important, and have a job to do as a moving, living temple, reflecting His love and holiness. The Church is God's dwelling place and legacy, His training and worship center where people are empowered by Him to worship Him (Ex. 19:6; 2 Sam. 7:5-7, 12-16; Matt. 16:18; Mark 12:10-11; John 2:19; Acts 2:33; Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 3:16; 15:45; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; Col. 3:1-15; Heb. 3:6; 7:26; 10:10; 1 Pet. 2: 4-10).
- *Father of all... over all... through all...* in all. Every aspect of our lives is governed by our Lord, so let us be so that every aspect of our lives is governed by our Lord in perfect harmony.

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

There is no true Christianity without the practice of being humble and kind. If we are not humble and kind, if we come across as prideful, selfish or conceited then we display our depravity and not the work of the Holy Spirit. If our depravity comes in contact with a fellow pseudo-Christian's depravity, where the work of the Holy Spirit is amiss or backslidden or never has taken place, the only outcome that can occur is strife and conflict. Pride does not like pride. One's pride despises another's, so turmoil will be in Christ's house.

Church Leadership Tip: To create a church of unity, leaders should be grateful to share our kindness and humility in Christ as we display His Glory. So, let us learn and grow, so we can be better at knowing Him and showing Him as we depend on Christ and His Mighty Work in us--empowering us! In this way, we will grow and be a church unified and impacting.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions, see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?

10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What is your *calling*? What do you think that means?
2. How has God been patient with you?
3. What does it mean to you to walk worthy in our Lord?
4. Can a person claim authentic Christianity if they are always irritable, selfish or rude?
5. What does being humble in our personality look like? What are the objections you have seen people have?
6. What causes you to be easily angered? How does someone being gentle with your help?
7. Have you considered your worth in Christ? That you have a life that matters and a purpose, no matter what you have been through or what lies ahead?
8. Why is it true that our life is not in our circumstances or material goods; rather who we are in Christ? What does this look like?
9. How can it be that having the Holy Spirit working in us will show patience? What does it mean for a Christian not to be patience?
10. How can you better live your life, no matter what, worthy, in a determined way? What would happen if you did this more?
11. What can you and your church do to make sure your Christianity is authentic, so you are not irritable or selfish or rude rather caring and kind?
12. What would your life look like with more kindness? How will this spur on church unity? How would this affect your neighborhood?